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St. Helena

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I. General

1. St. Helena, which is a Non-Self-Governing Territory administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consists of the island of St. Helena and two dependencies: the island of Ascension and a group of small islands forming the dependency of Tristan da Cunha.

2. Situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 1,900 kilometres from Angola and 2,900 kilometres from Brazil, St. Helena is a small island of volcanic origin. The island, where Jamestown, the capital, is located, is the largest of the Territory's islands, with an area of 122 square kilometres. Ascension lies 1,200 kilometres to the north-west of St. Helena, and Tristan da Cunha and the other small islands are approximately 2,400 kilometres to the south. The Territory comprises a total land area of 412 square kilometres. The islands enjoy a tropical climate tempered by trade winds that blow throughout the year. They have distinctive flora and fauna, with many rare or endangered species.

3. The uninhabited island of St. Helena was discovered in 1502 by the Portuguese navigator Juan da Nova. In 1633 the Netherlands claimed the island but did not occupy it. In the wake of a charter from the Lord Protector of Britain in 1657, later consolidated by a Royal Charter issued by King George II in 1661, the British East India Company proceeded in 1658 to colonize and fortify the island, which was subsequently settled by the English. Slaves were brought from Africa, Madagascar and the Far East. Chinese and some Indian indentured labourers were brought to work on the island. Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to St. Helena from 1815 until his death in 1821. St. Helena became a British Crown Colony in 1834.

4. The inhabitants of St. Helena are known as "Saints" or St. Helenians. According to a 1998 census, 5,010 people lived on St. Helena. However, in July 2003, the St. Helena Statistics Office estimated that there were between 3,750 and 3,800 inhabitants on the island, meaning that a quarter of the population had left in just over five years. The Office noted that, following the reintroduction of granting of British citizenship to Saints in 2002, the island experienced an exodus. A new island-wide population census was scheduled for 10 February 2007. Meanwhile 2006 figures show that the population had grown somewhat and reached 4,157 inhabitants.[1] While it is difficult to forecast future population trends, it is likely that the high emigration rate has ended for the most part, as most people desiring to leave have already done so, while the population in the age groups most likely to leave has been depleted. Approximately one fifth of the population resides in Jamestown. English is the official language of St. Helena.

II. Constitutional, legal and political developments

5. The St. Helena Constitution Order of 1988, which entered into force on 1 January 1989, replaced the Constitution of St. Helena and dependencies introduced on 1 January 1967. Under the 1988 Constitution, the Governor and

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Note: The information contained in the present paper has been derived from published sources, including those of the territorial Government, and from information transmitted to the Secretary-General by the administering Power under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations.

[1] Information provided by the administering Power, January 2007.

Commander-in-Chief, who is appointed by the United Kingdom Government, administers the Territory. The Governor is assisted by an Executive Council and a Legislative Council. Mr. Andrew Gurr took up his appointment as the new Governor and Commander-in-Chief of St. Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha on 11 November 2007.

6. The Legislative Council comprises the Speaker, three ex officio members (the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney General) and 12 elected members. The Executive Council, which is presided over by the Governor, consists of the ex officio members and five of the elected members of the Legislative Council. Although a member of the Legislative Council and the Executive Council, the Attorney General has no vote in either body.

7. Elections are held by secret ballot, at intervals of not more than four years, by universal suffrage for those aged 18 years and over. While two political parties exist, they have been inactive since 1976 and elections are held on a non-partisan basis. The most recent general elections were held on 31 August 2005, when 12 candidates representing two constituencies were elected to the Legislative Council.

8. The Constitution of St. Helena provides for the separation of the judiciary from the Government. The legal system comprises a Court of Appeal, a Supreme Court and a Magistrates' Court, with a final appeal procedure lying open to the Privy Council of the United Kingdom. Local legislation is generally applied. However, where no local legislation has been enacted, the laws of the United Kingdom are applied to the extent applicable to local circumstances.

9. St. Helenians may hold British passports and may work anywhere within the European Union, having regained their right to British citizenship under the British Overseas Territories Act of May 2002. Those citizenship rights had been previously taken away by the British Nationality Act of January 1983.

10. Extensive negotiations and public consultations in relation to constitutional reform and modernization have been carried out in St. Helena since 2001. Desiring a system of government that would give more responsibility to locally elected representatives, the services of an independent constitutional adviser were employed to assist with examining options for constitutional reform and drafting a new constitution for the Territory.

11. In October 2002, following consultations with the adviser, the Legislative Council announced its proposed constitutional changes. A final draft constitution was completed following additional rounds of negotiations in 2003 and 2004. The new constitution proposed three main changes to the existing constitutional system in St. Helena: government by reference to partnership values; new guarantees of fundamental human rights; and a two-tier ministerial form of government. Further details on the proposed constitutional changes are contained in the 2005 working paper (A/AC.109/2005/14, paras. 11-25) and the 2007 working paper (A/AC.109/2007/14, paras. 12-16).

12. Following extensive negotiations and public consultations, a consultative poll was held on 25 May 2005 on St. Helena to determine whether St. Helenians wanted to adopt the new constitution. The United Kingdom had stressed that it would not bring the new constitution into force until it received a clear signal from St. Helenians that they wished to do so.

13. St. Helenians who voted in the consultative poll rejected the proposal by 52.6 per cent against and 47.2 per cent in favour. The new ministerial system of government was particularly controversial, whereas the human rights chapter and the partnership values declaration received more public support.[2] Members of the Legislative Council resolved to continue constitutional reform by incorporating the popular changes into the framework of the existing Constitution and working to streamline the current Government.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

14. In 2007, a shrinking tax base, partly owing to migration and an ageing population, has meant that St. Helena is heavily dependent on the United Kingdom and other external sources for funding. That funding allows the population to enjoy a higher standard of living than local resources would otherwise be able to sustain. St. Helena's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for 2006 was £3,100. Budgetary support from the United Kingdom is used to meet essential public services and to subsidize the Territory's dedicated shipping service.[3] In real terms, aid from the United Kingdom has increased over the past decade, and accounts for almost 56 per cent of all public investment expenditures.[4] As well as supporting the Government's annual budget, much of the capital investment in the Territory is funded through the Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Union.

15. According to information provided by the administering Power on 30 January 2008, DFID will soon be funding a public sector modernization programme.[4]

16. A visit to St. Helena by DFID representatives to discuss the three-year 2007-2010 aid package took place between 26 February and 6 March 2007. Underpinning that package, and following wide consultations with the public and private sectors as well as civil society, in October 2007 the St. Helena Government published a three-year sustainable development plan for 2007-2010 focusing on planned social and economic development for the period leading up to the opening of the airport.

17. It was agreed that the plan, which sets out a broad development strategy, would serve as a three-year rolling framework to move the aid package forward, and would be reviewed every two years. The plan is based on six previously agreed strategic objectives: improved access; improved standard of education; the development of a sustainable and vibrant economy; the development of a healthy community in a safe environment; the promotion and development of a sustainable workforce; and the continuing development and establishment of democratic rights, human rights and self-determination of the people.

18. All departments within the St. Helena Government are expected to produce business plans which are linked to the sustainable development plan.

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[2] *St. Helena Herald*, 3 June 2005.

[3] United Kingdom Overseas Territories Department, Department for International Development, press release, 14 March 2005.

[4] Information provided by the administering Power, 30 January 2008.

19. In order to provide an incentive to maintain a policy focus on sustainable development, all parties agreed that St. Helena would be able to retain and reallocate any budgetary savings in the recurrent budget made from efficiency measures and/or higher domestic revenues within the three-year framework. At the same time, however, the recurrent budget also has a "hard budget ceiling", which means that any overspends would have to be met by in-year reprioritization or expenditure savings.[5]

20. According to information provided by the administering Power, total budgetary aid, development assistance and shipping support from the United Kingdom Government was £16.153 million for the 2007/2008 fiscal year, compared to £14.761 million during the previous period — a 9.4 per cent increase. The United Kingdom approved the new aid package in June 2007.[6]

21. In order to facilitate private-sector development, the St. Helena Government has established policies that focus on creating new enterprises, privatizing existing State-owned assets, and vocational training. According to the administering Power, the private sector is projected to grow as a proportion of the total economy from 30 per cent in 2004 to 40 per cent in 2015.[6]

B. Development projects

22. As of 1997, St. Helena received assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), when the first country cooperation framework between UNDP and the St. Helena Government was approved. In 2002, the UNDP Executive Board, however, decided to cease assistance following a transition period. This decision was based on the fact that the aid provided by the United Kingdom had contributed to an increase in St. Helena's GDP per capita, which exceeded the established GDP threshold for UNDP assistance.[7] Therefore, activities under the last ongoing project, concerning training and retraining for long-term unemployed, were completed by the end of 2007.

23. St. Helena is also eligible to receive funds from the European Union, as mentioned earlier. In 2006, funding was released by the European Union for an extensive programme of infrastructure improvements relating to sea access on St. Helena and its Dependencies. The approved activities are now in full implementation. The total value of the programme is 17.79 million euros.

24. Large-scale projects funded by DFID include upgrading and extension of the island's electricity distribution system; installation of additional wind turbines; upgrading of wastewater systems; expansion of the St. Helena Development Agency's role and services to facilitate investment and private sector growth; and the construction of a purpose-built community care complex and adult vocational training. A project memorandum relating to solid waste management is currently awaiting approval by DFID. The agreed allocations of development aid, within the current three year framework, to support these projects are £1.850 million in 2007/2008; and £1.591 million in 2008/2009. In addition, DFID is funding a major infrastructure review that will enable a comprehensive plan to be developed

[5] Information provided by the administering Power, March 2007.
[6] *St. Helena Herald*, 15 April 2005.
[7] Information provided by UNDP, February 2007.

identifying St. Helena's infrastructure requirements over the next 10 to 20 years. For information on a planned airport to be funded by DFID see para. 31-34 below.[7]

C. Agriculture and fisheries

25. Fisheries are an important sector in St. Helena's economy. In 2004, two St. Helenian fishing vessels developed the capacity to fish beyond the 12-mile inshore waters of the island's 200-mile exclusive economic zone. In February 2006, one of these vessels broke its anchor and ran aground. Owing to the limited lifting facilities available on the island, the vessel could not be taken out of the water or shipped offshore for repairs and therefore had to be disposed of by sinking. The second vessel failed to meet the safety certification as required by the Marine Consultants in June 2006 and has therefore been restricted from carrying out offshore operations until the necessary safety measures have been implemented. There are a total of 32 fishing boats with commercial licences. The local fishermen sell their catch to the St. Helena Fisheries Corporation. Fish purchases for the first half of the financial year 2006/2007 were 309 metric tons. The volume of fish exported was 150.5 metric tons. There has been no take-up of foreign fishing licences for 2006/2007, although those licences have in the past contributed up to 20 per cent of all local revenue.[7]

26. St. Helena has developed a reputation for the high quality of its coffee and fish. St. Helena's coffee is considered one of the finest premium coffees in the world. Its wild fish are the first to receive organic certification from the Soil Association, the United Kingdom's leading campaigning and certification organization for organic food and farming. Plans are currently in hand to investigate the possibility of obtaining international Marine Stewardship Council accreditation for the waters around St. Helena. This accreditation is awarded for sustainable and environmentally responsible fishing.[8]

27. With regard to farming, in August 2005 a drip irrigation project was completed, connecting 69 farmers to St. Helena's new irrigation system. A new agricultural improvement scheme became effective on 8 January 2008, which replaced all previous policy schemes offered by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department. The scheme provides grants for sheep farming and for apiculture, and subsidies for the purchase of herbicides. It is anticipated that it will extend to grants for livestock housing and pasture management in subsequent years.[9]

D. Transport, communications and utilities

1. General

28. Access to St. Helena is provided by the RMS *St. Helena*, which serves St. Helena, Ascension, Walvis Bay, Namibia and Cape Town, South Africa. The nearest airstrip is located on Ascension. Plans are under way for the construction of an international airport on St. Helena (see paras. 31-34 below). With recent announced delays, the airport is now expected to become operational by 2011-2012. At that point, the United Kingdom Government will withdraw its subsidy from the

[8] www.saintshelena.gov.sh, 13 December 2006.

[9] *St. Helena Herald*, 18 January 2008.

RMS *St. Helena*, and it will be for the St. Helena Government to decide whether to retain the vessel in service.

29. St. Helena's only port, Jamestown, provides good anchorage, although the building of a breakwater would allow passengers of large cruise vessels to come ashore in all types of weather. There is a continuing debate about the need for a breakwater, following the decision to build a jetty in neighbouring Rupert's Bay as part of the air access project.

30. St. Helena has approximately 120 kilometres of surfaced roads and 20 kilometres of earth roads. In 2006 and 2007, a considerable amount of road work was completed. The road projects included resurfacing 10 kilometres of highway, patching 50 kilometres of road, cleaning 50 kilometres of road verge and building 100 metres of safety railing and 300 square metres of retaining walls. Four district and two community roads were also completed during this period. A public transport system was launched in November 2003 by the St. Helena Government.

2. Airport

31. As previously mentioned, following extended consultation between the Government of St. Helena and DFID, it was announced in March 2005 that the Department would provide funding for the construction of an international airport on St. Helena. That agreement was subject to satisfactory bids for a contract covering the design, building and operation of the airport, as well as a rigorous environmental impact assessment. A tender process in mid-2006 failed to deliver a successful contract, and a revised tender was issued later that year. In November 2007, two bids were received and are currently being evaluated. Provided that the bids represent value for money, it is expected that a contract for the construction will be signed by mid-2008.[9]

32. Work is currently under way to prepare the formal application for Development Permission for the airport. An additional period of public information is planned prior to submission of the application, to include public meetings and displays. The cost of undertaking the airport project has not been disclosed, as DFID considers that disclosure of cost estimates could prejudice the competitive tender process. Feasibility work suggests that with air access, St. Helena may graduate from United Kingdom financial assistance by around 2030.[10]

33. A Development Board was formed in June 2005 to oversee the air access project. The Board consists of representatives from the Government of St. Helena, the private sector and civil society. The Board's main role is to advise the Executive Council on development policies and strategies to ensure successful completion of the airport. The main areas of interest identified by the Board are policies concerning immigration, landholding, tax, development and employment.[11]

34. The announcement by DFID that it would fund the construction and operation of an international airport on St. Helena was, in general, welcomed in the Territory, although some Saints have expressed concern about the environmental impact on the island. The proposed airport will be located on Prosperous Bay Plain on the eastern side of the island. The airport will have a runway 2,250 metres long, which

[10] Ibid., 15 April 2005.
[11] Ibid., 10 June 2005.

is sufficient to support the landing of long-haul jet aircraft, including the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737-800.[12] The airport is expected to service 7,000 passengers (including 1,500 tourists) in the first year and 15,000 passengers (including 8,000 tourists) within five years.

3. Communications

35. In January 2008, Broadband Internet access was introduced on St. Helena.

4. Utilities

36. As mentioned above in paragraph 24 under DFID-funded projects, work is under way to upgrade and extend the island's electricity distribution system and additional wind turbines are being installed. St. Helena's wastewater systems are also being upgraded.

E. Banking and credit

37. In December 2007, the Attorney General's Chambers published a draft Financial Services Bill and a Money Laundering Bill. The bills aim to ensure that St. Helena complies with international obligations, while safeguarding St. Helenians from fraudulent financial service providers. For more information on that sector, see the 2005 working paper (A/AC.109/2005/14).[13]

F. Tourism

38. The St. Helena Tourist Office has been boosting its efforts to market St. Helena as a tourist destination with the limited resources available. Its 10-year tourism strategy focuses on four essential elements: planning, investment, delivering quality tourist services and promotion. Leading international tourism consultants have been working with St. Helena representatives to develop a strategy that encompasses all four elements.[14] In January 2007, a new tourism and investment policy became effective, and a Tourism Commissioner will take up a two-year appointment in July 2008. The Commissioner will, inter alia, be required to develop a project memorandum to secure funding for tourism development on the island. The St. Helena tourist industry is currently also based around the promotion of Napoleon Bonaparte's imprisonment on the island where he was held from 1815 until his death in 1821.[15]

39. In 2005, St. Helena experienced a small increase in so-called environmental tourism, thanks to the Territory's unique attractions. According to the administering Power, an estimated 1,500 passengers on cruise ships visited St. Helena in 2005 for these and other reasons. Once the airport becomes operational, St. Helena will encourage more visits from cruise ships by emphasizing that the airport will

[12] *St. Helena Independent*, 18 November 2005.
[13] *St. Helena Herald*, 4 January 2008.
[14] Ibid., 7 October 2005.
[15] www.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Helena.

facilitate passengers leaving or joining a cruise at the island.[16] The possibility for developing sport fishing tourism is also good on the island.

40. In July 2005, the St. Helena Leisure Company (Shelco), announced that it planned to invest £40 million in the Territory, including in the construction of a tourism resort with a new 18-hole course which would be the island's second golf course. Shelco's land purchase was given approval in July 2007, following concerns over the impacts on local hoteliers, and pending new tourism and investment policies. The approval, however, is subject to conditions which seek to ensure that the land be used to develop a five star accommodation and related facilities. The St. Helena Government wishes to see the development opened as soon as possible after the construction of the airport.[17]

41. A Land Development Control Plan was published in January 2007 following extensive public consultation. A Land Disposal Policy was also approved. That policy has subsequently been reviewed following public consultation and a revised version will be issued in January 2008. The policy provides guidance to the public and members of the public service in dealing with applications for the purchase or lease of Crown land for commercial or residential use.

42. The anticipated growth in tourism, particularly in connection with a new airport, has raised the challenges of how to reconcile economic growth with sustainable development, and the life cycle of tourism destinations with the impact on the local population and economy. The issue of sustainable development has been championed by a non-governmental organization known as *The Voice*. Formed in response to the March 2005 announcement of the airport construction, the organization highlights issues for the St. Helena Government to consider when setting the development agenda. Most of the concerns appear to have been taken into account with the formulation of the new investment and tourism policy.[16]

IV. Social conditions

A. General

43. As indicated by a team of representatives from DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office negotiating St. Helena's 2001-2003 country policy plan, measured by international norms St. Helena is a middle-income country with few signs of real material poverty. This is largely the result of the all-encompassing Government safety net, which guarantees everyone a minimum standard of living, and to social networks, which encourage the distribution of income among kin, most notably in the form of remittances.

44. The ageing population has created an increasing need for substantial investment in a new elderly care programme that includes sheltered housing and an elderly community care complex. There is currently one residential home called "The Haven" which provides both full-time and respite care.[16] There are currently 650 elderly people in the Territory who live on social benefits.[4]

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[16] St. Helena Investment and Tourism Policies, Government of St. Helena, November 2006.

[17] *St. Helena Herald*, 13 January 2007.

45. According to information provided by the administering Power, a new Welfare of Children Bill is with the legal department and it is hoped that it will go through further consultation processes to be ready for use in 2008. The new legislation will change the strategic management structure for safeguarding children and young people on St. Helena. New policies and procedures are already being developed and used in principle for child protection and safeguarding the welfare of children.[4] This new legislation once in effect, will fulfil St. Helena's obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

46. One of the four pillars in the Sustainable Development Plan is "Care for the Vulnerable", including; the elderly, households headed by single mothers, the disabled, the mentally handicapped and the long-termed unemployed. A social enterprise known as the St. Helena's Active Participation in Enterprise (SHAPE) has been set up to provide training, support and employment opportunities to people with disabilities.[4]

47. There is one general hospital in Jamestown, one psychiatric hospital and six health clinics serving people living in rural areas. In addition, two units cater to patients with behavioural problems and learning disabilities. Statistics of chronic health conditions affecting the population are diabetes, 13 per cent; hypertension, 19.2 per cent; cancer, 1 per cent; and asthma, 2 per cent.[4]

B. Employment

48. The public sector remains the dominant employer in St. Helena. The St. Helena Government is currently looking at standards of practice in employment in anticipation of the economic changes that are expected to ensue from the planned airport. In the Government's view, an employment policy, setting out minimum standards for employment contracts with a built-in measure of protection for local enterprises and organizations, would support local sustainable development. A social development planner is currently preparing the policy from which legislation will be drafted. During this preparatory period, extensive consultations will take place with St. Helenian employers and employees. Public meetings have also been scheduled.[18]

49. In 2003 the Government launched a policy addressing long-term unemployment, under which the Employment and Social Security Department has been working closely with the unemployed to identify their training needs. The training is considered successful as the number of people on the Community Work scheme has been reduced from 176 in 2003, when the policy was introduced, to 46 people in early 2008.[19]

50. By the end of 2007, UNDP phased out a project whose overall objective was to reduce long-term unemployment on St. Helena through a joint private- and public-sector training and work experience scheme. The scheme, begun in 2005, aimed at helping unemployed St. Helenians to find jobs, improve their prospects of remaining employed and enhance their future employment prospects.

[18] Ibid., 18 January 2007 and 8 February 2008.

[19] Ibid., 8 February 2008.

51. Offshore employment has steadily increased and, with it, remittances to the Territory. Approximately 1,100 St. Helenians, or close to 27 per cent of the island's workforce, are employed on Ascension, in the Falkland Islands or in the United Kingdom; their remittances to St. Helena in 2005/2006 totalled £2.6 million.

52. However, as virtually all contracts for offshore employment are for unaccompanied workers, a significant social burden results, owing to the dislocation of families. In addition, the loss of trained staff to better-paid offshore employment makes it necessary to bring in more expatriate workers, in particular nurses and teachers. According to the administering Power, a strategic review conducted by the St. Helena Government showed that remittances from offshore workers were not sustainable and stated that no community could prosper if its biggest export was its people.

53. The St. Helena Public Service Association came into existence in April 2005, its main goal being to aid, assist and promote the welfare and well-being of its membership. The Association is similar to a workers' union and represents the interests of St. Helena Government employees.[20]

C. Education

54. Education is compulsory and free for children between 5 and 15 years of age. Currently there are six schools in operation, including one all-through amalgamated primary school attended by a total of 632 pupils and 69 full-time teachers. By September 2008, following the Department's restructuring process there will be three all-through amalgamated primary schools and one secondary school for students aged 11 to 18. Post-compulsory-aged students opt for either academic or vocational courses.[21]

55. The results of British standardized attainment tests in English, Mathematics and Science at Key Stages 2 and 3 indicate that educational standards have risen over the years. Analyses of examination of Key Stages 4 and 5 have also shown an improvement of educational standards. The Education Department is currently following a reorganization agenda which is intended to address staff attrition issues, falling pupil rolls and greater use of existing resources in order to continue to improve educational standards. Retaining qualified, experienced staff continues to be a challenge.[4] Since 2007, overseas territories citizens have qualified for the home student fee rate at English universities.

D. Environment

56. St. Helena has an environmental conservation programme aimed at preserving endangered species and the diversity of habitats, which are an important part of the Territory's heritage and could potentially increase tourism. In September 2001, the United Kingdom and its territories adopted a set of environment charters setting out for the first time their mutual responsibilities regarding the environment.

[20] Ibid., 27 January 2007.

[21] Prince Andrew School, St. Helena, www.princeandrew.edu.sh.

57. The World Conservation Union lists 40 per cent of St. Helena's endemic plants as endangered, while other conservationists insist that the actual proportion is higher. Of the approximately 430 endemic invertebrates, some are now thought to be extinct and many are endangered or of conservation concern. St. Helena was once home to nine species of endemic birds, today only one species survives and is classified as critically endangered. With regard to invasive species, St. Helena is in receipt of funds from the European Union's regional envelope to address the issue as part of a project involving all the South Atlantic territories.[4]

58. In December 2005, the United Kingdom engineering and environmental consulting company Faber Maunsell Ltd. conducted a preliminary study on the impact of the new airport on St. Helena's environment. Details of the initial report have not been made available. Faber Maunsell will continue its monitoring activities for the duration of airport-development works to mitigate any potentially negative environmental effects.

59. In December 2007, a Solid Waste Management Project Memorandum relating to the long-term waste management strategy of St. Helena was submitted to DFID. The memorandum deals with waste recycling and the shipping of ferrous materials off the island.[22]

V. Dependencies of St. Helena

A. Ascension

1. General

60. Ascension was discovered by the Portuguese in 1501 and "found" again on Ascension Day in 1503 by Alphonse d'Albuquerque, who named the uninhabited island. Ascension covers an area of 90 square kilometres and is of volcanic origin. In 1815, when Napoleon was a prisoner on St. Helena, a small British naval garrison was stationed on Ascension. The island remained under Admiralty supervision until 1922, when it was made a dependency of St. Helena. From then until 1964, the island was managed by the Eastern Telegraph Company (renamed Cable and Wireless in 1934). In 1964, in view of the plans to establish British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Composite Signal Organization stations, an Administrator was appointed. During the Second World War, the United States Government built the Wideawake airstrip on the island. In 1957, a United States Air Force presence was re-established and the airstrip and ancillary facilities enlarged. It is now the south-east tracking station for the United States Air Force Eastern Test Proving Ground. In 1982, it became the intermediate stop for Royal Air Force flights to and from the Falkland Islands. In 2003, British and United States officials signed the Wideawake Agreement, which opened up the airstrip to civilian charter traffic.

2. Constitutional and political status

61. In March 2007, the elected Councillors on the Ascension Island Council resigned. An attempt to hold a general election was made on 1 May 2007, but only two persons came forward as candidates. In the light of that, and to enable an

[22] *St. Helena Herald*, 7 December 2007.

assessment of the democratic system on the island to be undertaken, the Island Council Ordinance was suspended in May 2007, for one year. At the conclusion of the suspension, it is intended to hold a further general election. Meanwhile, an Advisory Group was appointed to advise the Governor on policy. In addition, public consultations are being held to seek the views of and to encourage the people on the island to participate in the democratic process.[4] Governor Gurr made his first official visit to Ascension Island from 10 to 22 January 2007. While on the island, the Governor had a full programme of meetings, including with a group of heads of major organizations, in an effort to ensure that organizations located on Ascension are satisfied with the Island's operations since they provide vital job opportunities for the Saints residing there.[23]

3. Economic and social conditions

62. A joint meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Ministry of Defence team and the Ascension Island Council was held in 2005. The meeting, which was chaired by then-Governor Michael Clancy, addressed the much-debated issue of right of abode and property ownership on Ascension.[24] The final decision on the issue was reached in January 2006, when the United Kingdom Government decided that permanent right of abode and property ownership would not be granted. One of the main concerns for the United Kingdom Government was the tax liabilities that could fall on British taxpayers.[24] Governor Gurr addressed the issue following his visit, noting the difficulty of investing in something one doesn't own. He further indicated that, while not widely welcomed, the issues surrounding abode and ownership were understood and generally accepted as an inevitable "given" in the present socio-economic equation.[25]

B. Tristan da Cunha

1. General

63. The dependency of Tristan da Cunha is composed of four islands: the main island, Tristan da Cunha; Gough; Inaccessible; and Nightingale. Tristan da Cunha, a round volcanic island with an area of 98 square kilometres, is the most remote inhabited island in the world. Its closest neighbours are St. Helena, 2,334 kilometres to the north, and Cape Town, South Africa, 2,778 kilometres to the east. The only settlement on the island is the capital, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas. A team of South African meteorologists live on Gough. Inaccessible and Nightingale are uninhabited.

64. Tristan da Cunha's entire population was evacuated to the United Kingdom for a period of 18 months when the volcano last erupted in 1961, but returned in 1963. Following a series of earth tremors in the summer of 2004, the British Geological Survey was engaged to monitor seismic activity, and provide regular reports, with a view to evacuation preparedness. The DFID-administered contract with the Survey ended in 2006 and was not renewed.

65. As at December 2004, the population of Tristan da Cunha consisted of 275 people divided into approximately 100 households.

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[23] Ibid., 11 January 2008.

[24] Ibid., 23 December 2005.

[25] South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association, SARTMA.com, 27 January 2008.

2. Constitutional and political status

66. Executive authority for Tristan da Cunha is exercised by the Governor of St. Helena. A resident Administrator is appointed by the Governor and is responsible to him. The Administrator is advised by an Island Council, led by the Chief Islander and comprising eight elected members (including at least one woman) and three appointed members. Elections are held every three years. All registered voters over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. According to information provided by the administering Power, Tristan da Cunha was not consulted during the 2005/2006 constitutional debate on St. Helena.

67. Tristan da Cunha has its own legislation, but St. Helena law applies to the extent that it is not inconsistent with local law, insofar as it is suitable for local circumstances and subject to such modifications as local circumstances make necessary. As a last resort, the laws of England and Wales apply. There is one full-time police officer and two special constables. The Administrator also serves as the Magistrate.

3. Economic and social conditions

68. Tristan da Cunha's economy is based on traditional subsistence farming and fishing. Earnings from the commercial Tristan da Cunha rock lobster industry, and the sale of postage stamps, coins and souvenirs, are used to fund health, education and other government services. Islanders also supplement their income by providing accommodation and guided tours to infrequent visitors and from the sale of handicrafts.

69. Good fisheries management has improved lobster stocks, and the annual quota is gradually increasing. But because the product is sold in United States dollars, movements in the exchange rate together with rising oil prices have reduced income. Island Councillors are currently considering a proposal by the concession holder to extend the existing concession to 2026.

70. Access to Tristan da Cunha is only possible by sea. Presently the harbour is in a poor state of repair and can only be used when weather and sea conditions are suitable, with cruise ships often unable to land passengers. Any further deterioration in the condition of the harbour may also have implications for the fishing industry, which relies on 30 to 70 fishing days per annum for additional income and food. Accordingly, European Union funding has paid for a study of harbour rehabilitation, and a joint DFID/Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Ministry of Defence will see seven Royal Engineers arrive in early 2008 on a reconnaissance study, followed shortly thereafter by 50 Royal Engineers to undertake repairs.[26]

71. Access is mainly provided by two fishing vessels operated by the South African company Ovenstone, which holds the fishing concession for Tristan da Cunha lobster, and by the SS *Aghulas*, a South African research vessel which services their weather station on Gough Island. Between them they visit Tristan da Cunha eight or nine times a year, operating a passenger and freight service. The journey between Cape Town and Tristan da Cunha usually takes from five to seven days.[26]

[26] *St. Helena Herald*, 25 January 2008.

72. Tristan da Cunha is now enjoying excellent telecommunications with the outside world, following the installation of an improved telephone network early in 2007. Calls to and from United Kingdom and elsewhere cost little more than one pence a minute. An Internet café offers islanders easy access to the Internet.[26]

73. According to information provided by the administering Power, for many years Tristan da Cunha has spent substantially more than it has earned, leading to a drain on its reserves. Other contributory issues are inexperience of financial management and poor communication with London.[4] Rising costs such as fuel prices and offshore medical treatment have exacerbated the problem.[4]

74. The DFID annual allocation (approximately £250,000) funds the health-care project (resident doctor plus annual dental and optician visits), together with a modest training programme. According to the administering Power, more training (both on and off island) and technical assistance, particularly in revenue-earning and import-substitution activities, might help to slow the economic decline.[4]

75. Since the United Kingdom Overseas Development Administration withdrew expatriate British teachers in the early 1990s, the education sector on Tristan da Cunha has been in decline, and the current standard is considered poor. Pupils leave school at age 16 and tend to work in Government or the fishing sector. They have no opportunity to proceed to further education unless they go abroad. The current staff, who by their own admission are poorly trained, are all middle-aged and there are no trainee teachers in the pipeline. The Island Council judge that reform and improvement in this sector are key to a successful future.

76. Tristan da Cunha is successfully implementing a number of conservation projects, with help from its partners such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. These include Overseas Territory Environmental Programme projects to remove invasive species from uninhabited islands in the Tristan da Cunha group, and also studies on the feasibility of eradicating introduced rodents. Tristan da Cunha also has a Biodiversity Action Plan to help it to meet its commitments under the relevant Convention.[4]

VI. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the territorial Government

77. The position of the territorial Government regarding the future status of St. Helena is reflected under section II on constitutional issues.

B. Position of the administering Power

78. In a statement made at the 5th meeting of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), held on 11 October 2007, during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly (see A/C.4/62/SR.5), the representative of the United Kingdom inter alia said that "her Government, as administering Power for 10 Non-Self-Governing Territories, gave every help and encouragement to those Territories which wished to proceed to independence, where that was an option. Her Government and its overseas territories continued to work towards the shared goals of security, stability and sustainable political and economic development, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. … Her Government

carefully considered all proposals for constitutional change received from the Territories."

79. As previously reported (see A/AC.109/2007/3), in a statement made on 24 April 2006, the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Minister took stock of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories seven years on from the 1999 White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories."[27] An elaboration of the United Kingdom's position on alternative forms of relationship, as set out in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV), has been previously provided (ibid.).

VII. Action by the General Assembly

80. On 17 December 2007, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolutions 62/118 A and B, based on the report of the Special Committee transmitted to the General Assembly,[28] which at the time reflected a situation of high unemployment on the island, and its subsequent consideration by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) (A/62/412). Section IX of resolution 62/118 B concerns St. Helena. Under that section's operative paragraphs, the General Assembly:

> 1. *Welcomes* the continuing constitutional review process and the consultative poll led by the Government of Saint Helena in cooperation with the administering Power;
>
> 2. *Also welcomes* the decision by the administering Power to provide funding for the construction of an international airport on Saint Helena to become operational in 2011-2012, including all required infrastructure;
>
> 3. *Requests* the administering Power and relevant international organizations to continue to support the efforts of the territorial Government to address the socio-economic development challenges, including the high unemployment and the problems of limited transport and communications, as well as to support the additional infrastructure required for the airport project;
>
> 4. *Calls upon* the administering Power to take into account the concerns of Saint Helenians with regard to the right to nationality.

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[27] "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories", White Paper submitted to the House of Commons on 17 March 1999, by the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs; reproduced in A/AC.109/1999/1, annex.

[28] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 23* (A/62/23).